

HEHF says be aware of stroke symptoms and get help quickly

May is American Stroke Month, and this year's message from the American Stroke Association is: "With Stroke... Time Lost = Brain Lost." Each year about 700,000 people suffer a new or recurrent stroke in the United States. More than 167,000 of these people die, making stroke the third leading cause of death.

A stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted by a blood clot or a broken blood vessel. This lack of oxygen kills brain cells in the immediate area, often causing physical and emotional disabilities including speech problems, memory loss and paralysis.

Individuals with the highest risk have a combination of factors that may include family history of stroke, existing cardiovascular conditions, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, a history of heart attack or stroke, tobacco use, and age greater than 55. By quitting smoking, working with your doctor to treat high cholesterol levels and high blood pressure, eating healthy, exercising and controlling your weight, you can reduce your stroke risk.

A stroke can occur at any time, at any age, to anyone. It is important to recognize a stroke and act quickly. According to the American Heart Association, on average, people wait 22 hours after the start of stroke symptoms to get to a hospital. Every minute you delay increases your risk of permanent brain damage.

The warning signs of stroke include the following symptoms:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg — especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Any of these symptoms may last only a few minutes, which may be caused by a "mini-stroke," called a transient ischemic attack, or TIA. TIAs are extremely important indicators of an impending stroke. If symptoms appear, call 9-1-1 to get medical attention immediately.

If you would like a Hanford Environmental Health Foundation staff member to come to your work site to check blood pressures, or if you would like to schedule a safety meeting presentation, call Health Education Services at 373-3729 or send an e-mail message to *HEHF Health Education Services. ■